

ACTIVITY BASED LEARNING AS SELF-ACCESSING STRATEGY TO PROMOTE LEARNERS' AUTONOMY

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ABSTRACT

The Activity Based Learning (ABL) is unique and effective to attract out-of-school children to schools. It facilitates readiness for learning, instruction, reinforcement and evaluation. ABL has transformed the classrooms into hubs of activities and meaningful learning. Activity-based learning, naturally leads to cooperative learning. Since group work is a common feature of ABL, self-accessing is largely possible in ABL approach. Self access learning promotes students to study independently choosing from among different resources that are available. Self-access is closely related to learner-centered approach, learner autonomy and self-directed learning as all focus on student responsibility and active participation for his/her own learning. This style of instruction is most often done in the setting of a self-contained learning environment or self-access center. This article focuses on learner's autonomy through ABL as Self-accessing strategy.

Key Words: Activity based Learning, Self-Accessing strategy, Learner's Autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

Activity Based Learning (ABL) refers to learning where students physically and mentally explore subject by simulation of the work environment, manipulation of tools and materials associated with the world of work, or performance of a real work task. Activity-based learning method includes the desired activities in terms of knowledge, attitude and skill. Prensky (2001) presents different learning activities which are intended to facilitate the learning of different types of knowledge. According to him effective learning may take place through drill and practice, continuous practice, reasoning through puzzles and examples etc.

The interactivity among the students is the key factor for successful learning. The interactive resources or environment are helpful to learners because these resources can be accessed at any time and as many times as the learner chooses. In short, interactivity is the base for Activity Based Learning. The ABL method of learning provides the following attributes like; Learning can be fun, Learning must come from within (self-directed), Human psychology (attitude, determination, perseverance, etc) and plays a pivotal role in optimum learning. Logic and Math form the foundation for effective learning for all areas. Further, according to ABL

method, learning involves 5 basic steps viz., Participation, Clarification, Understanding, Application and Reinforcement. It adopts a holistic approach to engage the body and the mind of students so that they find it refreshing, exciting and stimulating. Through ABL, teachers are able to draw out the enthusiasm of the students thereby creating responsible and proactive learners.

Activity Based Learning is a multi-directional learning experience in which learning takes place between teacher-to-student, student-to-teacher, and student-to-student. Active Learning involves activity-based learning experiences like input, process, and output. These activity-based experiences take many shapes like whole class involvement, teams, small groups, triads, pairs and individuals.

More so, activity-based experiences involves many forms like talking, writing, reading, discussing, debating, acting, role-playing, journaling, conferencing, interviewing, building, creating, etc. The key feature of the ABL method is that it uses learner-friendly educational aids to foster self-learning and allows a learner to study according to his or her aptitude and skill. Educationists suggest that the ABL system will provide quality education to children in government schools.

The Process of ABL approach

According to observers, the ABL method has created a visible improvement in children's learning and psychology. Children learn to make independent decisions at a young age, from choosing their activity card for the day to mark their own attendance. The Department of School Education in Tamil Nadu has implemented the ABL approach in all the Primary Schools in the state and has prescribed the steps for conducting ABL method as follows:

- Competencies are split into different parts/units and converted into different activities.
- Each part/unit is called as a milestone.
- In each subject, the relevant milestones are clustered and linked as chain and this chain of milestones is called LADDER.
- Each milestone has different steps of learning process and each step of learning process is represented by logo.
- Milestones are arranged in a logical sequence from simple to complex and also activities in each milestone.
- Group cards are used to enable the children to organize in groups.
- Evaluation is inbuilt in the system. Separate cards / activities are used for this purpose.
- Each child is provided with workbook/worksheet for further reinforcement activities.
- Children's progress is recorded through annual assessment chart.
- Each milestone has different type of activities such as introduction, reinforcement, practice, evaluation, remedial and enrichment activities represented by different logos.

Activity Based Learning as Self-Accessing Strategy

Self-accessing is largely possible in ABL approach. Self access learning promotes students skill to study independently, choosing from among different resources that are available. Self-access is closely related to learner-centered approach, learner autonomy and self-

directed learning as all focus on student responsibility and active participation for his/her own learning. This style of instruction is most often done in the setting of a self-contained learning environment or self-access center.

The advantage of this form of learning is that students are able to set the pace of their work within least time. Depending on the individual, students can also set the level and content of their work. Students can use these centers voluntarily or can have assignments to complete it. The major advantage, therefore, is flexibility, with the purpose of giving the students themselves the opportunity to tailor the course more according to their learning needs and styles than a mere traditional mode of teaching.

ABL Promotes Learners' Autonomy

Activity based learning engages the student in the process of constructing his own learning independently rather than passively receiving information which may or may not have meaning for him/her. Independent quality is one of dimension of academic development. The learners must have some autonomy in their learning process. For instance, the learners should be given freedom in terms of selection of subject, methods of learning and when to study or learn etc. All these learners' autonomy is possible in the ABL method. The present education system in India is so competitive and test driven. The independent quality of the learner will enhance such a competitive tendency and risk taking behavior. Hence, the learning autonomy for the learners is inevitable. According to Holec (1981) learners' autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's learning. Benson & Voller (1997) stated that the learners' autonomy may take place in the following ways:

- for situations in which learners study entirely on their own
- for a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning
- for an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education
- for the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning

- for the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning

Most of the psychologists have opined that self-accessing is the strategy to enhance the independent quality among the learners. Reinders & Lázaro (2006) summarize some of the characteristics of self-access strategy like a) Learners determine what they learn, b) how and when they learn, c) there is little or no formal assessment, d) staff is available for advice, e) selection of materials and activities encourage reflection and autonomous learning skills among the students. Self-access is thus highly flexible (learners play the central role in establishing their own curriculum) and highly fluid (learners may or may not come back or come regularly to study).

Conclusion

Effective learning depends on the capacity of the learner to take on the responsibility to learn independently from the teacher. The students should recognize their difficulties and fulfill their needs. For this to happen, it is necessary that the teacher promotes opportunities to develop the capacity of the student to think independently, self-manage his/her own activities and make choices in regard to his/her learning processes. The ABL method of learning provides such an autonomy to the learners that the student know how to decide what is best

for him/her, establish objectives, plan a study program, identify and select the content to achieve proposed objectives, administer the assignments and study time, identify his/her negative points and qualities, evaluate his/her learning and redo his/her actions. It is also desirable that he/she take the initiative on the more appropriate resources to his/her way of learning. Hence, the ABL method can be promoting learners' autonomy. Further, it can be of both supporting as well as an alternative strategy to the conventional method of learning through which the rate of drop outs and out of schools will be reduced.

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